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ABSTRACT

This student guide for a program focusing on how young children go about defining themselves, how this effort can affect the relationships with other family members, and how parents can ease the process, is designed around a magazine format to allow maximum flexibility to different groups using the materials. The guide is divided into seven sections: (1) an overview of the theme and contents; (2) a summary of the major learnings of the theme; (3) feature articles containing the major content and including practical suggestions for parents and future parents; (4) a film review section which includes a synopsis of the accompanying film program and a related discussion question; (5) three activities aimed at both individual and group participation; (6) a selection of field activities, discussion questions, and research topics designed to reinforce the ideas presented in the articles and meet the needs of a wide variety of classroom groups; and (7) a bibliography for further reading on the theme. (Author/JEG)

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IDENTITY:

THE "I'S" HAVE IT

Queen for a Day



A world to be born under your footsteps. . .
St.-John Perse

FROM THE EDITORS

Who am I? This is one of the big questions facing each of us, and we each have to find our own answer.

Many people associate the search for identity with adolescence, mid-life, or other turning points in life. Actually, though, this process begins at birth. It is as babies and young children that we first start to grope for "me."

In this booklet you will learn how young children go about defining themselves, and how this effort can affect their relationships with other family members. You will find out that parents can ease this process, and help children paint a picture of themselves that is clear and strong.

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THE BIG IDEAS



Every person has the need to feel special and unique.



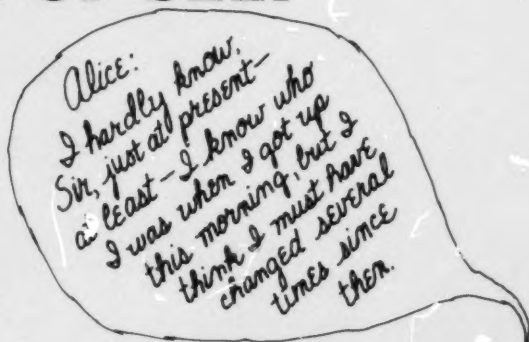
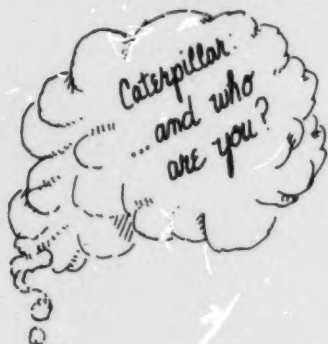
Children's search for identity expresses itself in many different ways and sometimes brings them into conflict with other family members.



When parents realize that many of children's behaviors are efforts to establish identity, they are more likely to help their children grow and develop.



THE SOURCE OF SELF



Lewis Carroll—*Alice in Wonderland*

We all want to be special.

We all need to feel that we have our own important place in the world. Most of all, we need to be noticed and respected by other people. Only in this way can we become secure and independent adults. Only if we know who we are can we build healthy relationships with others.

This sense of oneself as a separate and unique person is called **IDENTITY**. We are not born with a sense of identity. Nor is identity suddenly acquired when we reach a certain age:

Identity is the result of a long process that begins at birth and continues throughout life.

Newborn babies don't know that they are persons. In fact, to young babies, the world is all one thing. They don't know that their fingers belong to them and their mothers' fingers belong to someone else. They see their feet as strange objects that sometimes come into view. They can't tell the difference between touching these feet and touching their teddy bear's paws.

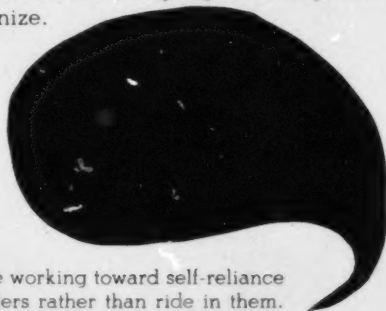
Gradually, however, by touching, tasting, watching, and listening, babies learn where their bodies end and the rest of the world begins. They learn that they have the power to make their feet appear and disappear. They learn that when they bite their feet it hurts, but when they bite their teddy bear's paws it doesn't. They discover that they are separate from the people around them.

They discover "me."

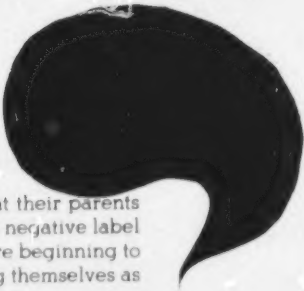
When they learn to talk, children acquire another tool for building a picture of themselves. Learning their own names gives children a symbol for thinking of themselves as separate and unique. Knowing words like "big" and "good" adds to their self-awareness. Hearing words like "little" and "bad" also teaches them awareness — but of another kind.

And, as children grow and start to move around, they express this growing sense of "me" in behaviors that all parents will recognize.

Testing 1, 2, 3...



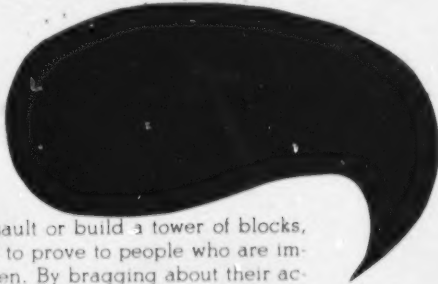
Toddlers like to do things for themselves. They are working toward self-reliance — or **Autonomy**. They want to push their strollers rather than ride in them. They want to put on clothes without help. In fact, at times toddlers absolutely insist on their independence.



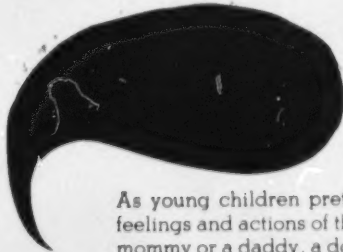
Because 2-year-old children often seem to do the opposite of what their parents suggest, this period is sometimes called "The Terrible Two's." This negative label clouds the fact that a very positive step is taking place. Toddlers are beginning to assert themselves as individuals. **Defiance** is one way of declaring themselves as separate persons with minds of their own.



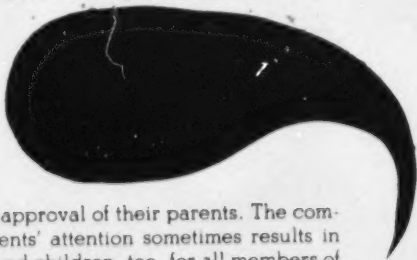
For 2- and 3-year-olds in our culture, being separate means the right to **Ownership**. Their refusal to share toys is not a sign that they will always be selfish. Rather, it shows that they are learning what belongs to them and what does not. After children feel sure that certain things are "mine," they can more easily let go of them and share them with other people.



Whether they have learned how to do a somersault or build a tower of blocks, young children want **Recognition**. They need to prove to people who are important to them that they can make things happen. By bragging about their accomplishments, children are simply asking for someone to affirm their power.



As young children pretend to be someone, they wholeheartedly enter into the feelings and actions of that role. **Role-Playing** teaches them what it's like to be a mommy or a daddy, a doctor or a nurse, a dancer or a pilot. Acting out these parts helps children begin to see what they can become.



All children want the exclusive attention and approval of their parents. The competition of brothers and sisters for their parents' attention sometimes results in conflicts. Tensions develop between parents and children, too, for all members of the family are working on identity. Just as children learning to walk bump into walls and tables, so children learning who they are bump into other people.

Many of these conflicts are an inevitable part of growing up. They help children learn that other people also have needs and may think differently from them. Through these collisions, children can learn to give and take.

Sometimes, though, family tensions are a clue to parents that children need more help in finding their place in the world. When this happens, there are some very specific things parents can do to help children find "me."



ERIK ERIKSON AND THE STAGES OF IDENTITY

Many of the ideas presented in these articles are based on the work of **Erik Erikson**. A European-born psychologist who now lives in the United States, Erikson has studied the process of growing up in many different cultures.

Erikson believes that we all pass through eight stages in our lifelong search for identity. What happens in the earlier stages, says Erikson, determines how successful we are in the later stages. Three of these stages occur during the first five years of life, when the strongest influence on children's identity comes from parents. Their responses determine which of the following qualities children develop:

Trust or Mistrust:

In the first stage, babies learn to either trust or mistrust other people. The amount of attention and support parents give children determines whether they become eager or afraid to explore the world.

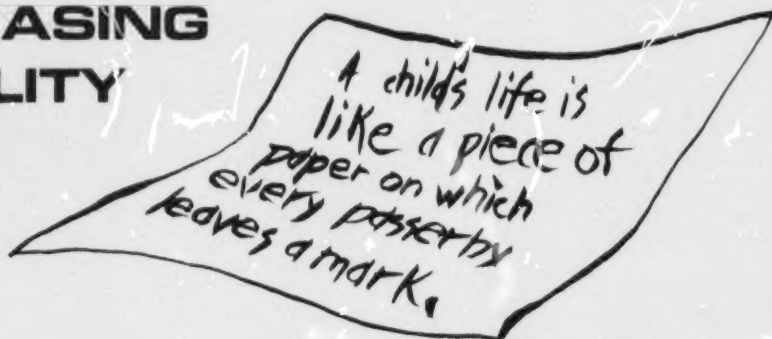
Initiative or Guilt:

When children have learned that they are masters of their own bodies, they start to experiment with new ways of doing things. If parents encourage these efforts, children develop **Initiative** — the desire to keep trying new things. But if parents ridicule their children's efforts, children feel guilty and stop trying.

Autonomy or Doubt:

As children start doing things for themselves, they develop either confidence or doubt in their ability to take care of themselves. Parents who are patient about children's need to be independent help them feel a sense of control over themselves. Parents who don't give children the freedom to do things on their own, or who refuse help when children need it, make them doubt their abilities.

INCREASING VISIBILITY



— Ancient Chinese Proverb

Children's images of themselves are formed largely through other people:

As parents and other grown-ups respond to them, children learn many important things about themselves.

They learn their names, their sex, and their ethnic group. They discover their strengths and weaknesses. They learn what they look like, what belongs to them, and what does not belong to them.

Children act. Parents react. This is how self-awareness develops. The actions and responses of parents help give a shape to the image the child is forming of "me." They are like mirrors in which the child's image is reflected.

To make sure that this image is clear and strong, parents can:

SHOW CHILDREN HOW THEY ARE SPECIAL.

Whether they are answering toddlers' endless questions or changing babies' endless diapers, parents can help children become more aware and proud of themselves. They can provide children with basic information about their bodies:

You have pretty black curly hair.

They can help children understand their feelings:

You feel sad when your sister goes to school, don't you?

They can point out children's special skills and accomplishments:

You put that puzzle together much faster today than yesterday.

Everyday reflections such as these support children in their journey toward self-discovery. Special activities such as those on the next page can give further clarity to the child's self-image.

PROVIDE CHILDREN WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO DO THINGS THEMSELVES

Identity grows when parents give children a part to play in everyday situations. For example, by letting children do things for themselves, parents support children in their struggle to be independent. By giving children simple but useful tasks to do around the house, parents show children that they have something to contribute to the family.

Parents can also find ways to set up their homes so that children can do more things for themselves. For instance, they can put some clothes hooks at a lower level, or provide step-stools for reaching drawers and sinks. Such activities help children feel that they have a secure place in the family.

TRY TO EXPERIENCE THE WORLD AS CHILDREN DO.

It can be difficult for a parent to respond with enthusiasm to a child's repeated cries of "Look at me! Look at me!" Or to react with patience to a child's stubborn "NO!" Or to be understanding when two brothers are quarreling.

Parents can deal with such situations more effectively, though, if they try to look at them from the child's point of view. By looking for the source of behaviors and conflicts, parents will often find that children are just trying to develop and assert their identity. Conflicts sometimes result when children feel that their identity is not being recognized. Understanding these feelings often helps parents find ways to strengthen their children's identity and — at the same time — lessen family tensions.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON IDENTITY

To form a strong and healthy sense of self, children need to have pride in themselves and an awareness of their place in the world. Here are some activities that can help them develop a clear image of...

...My Body

Introduce babies to themselves in a mirror.

Ask: "Who's that? Why, that's Tracy, C'Hourke! Hi, Tracy!"

As children get older, have them watch themselves as they put their hands on their heads, touch their noses and elbows, and count the parts of their bodies. Have them stand next to their brothers, sisters and friends to see how they are the same and how they are different.

...My Life

Start an Identity Book for Children.

In a large scrapbook, paste pictures, cards, and other mementos of important times in children's lives.

As they get older, children can collect their own treasures. They can even dictate comments for you to write in, and add their own illustrations.

...My Roots

Help Children Make a Picture Map of Their Neighborhood.

First take a walk to find the important places they'll want on their map: a park, school, grocery store, friend's house, etc.

Then, with a large piece of paper and some crayons, help children mark out where these things are. Start with their own house and street, and gradually add other streets and places. Label everything.

...My Future

Encourage Pretending.

As children play, they start to think about what they might become. Save old clothes and materials for them to use.

For example, some old clothes, empty cans, boxes, and jars help children pretend they are grocery shopping. Buttons, spools, and an old mirror glued to a piece of cardboard make an instrument panel for an airplane or car.

Help Children Make a Self-Portrait.

Have children lie down on a large piece of wrapping paper or several paper bags slit open and taped together. Trace the outline of their bodies.

Have children fill in this outline with their features: hair, eyes, nose, mouth, nails, etc. They can either draw in clothes or tape some old clothes to the picture.

Hang up their completed self-portrait where everyone can admire it.

Make a Time Line to Help Children Recall Past Events in Their Lives.

String a piece of clothline along a wall where children can reach it.

Give children clothespins to hang up pictures, cards, clothing, and other souvenirs of important events: the day they were born or the day they learned to ride a bike, for example. Put the events in the order that they happened.

Make a Family Tree.

Use old photographs and a large piece of paper. Make the children the focus of the tree.

Talk about how they are related to other people on the tree, and point out how they are similar to and different from their relatives: "You have red hair like Aunt Sarah." "You're the only person in our family with blue eyes."

Take Children to See What Other People Do and Provide Them With Books That Show People Doing Lots of Different Things.

If you're afraid that children will see poor examples that will limit their choices or expectations, make a special effort to show them what other people of their sex or race have done.

FILM REVIEW SECTION

Queen for a Day

Jeannie and Amos Sandburg notice that something seems to be "the matter" with Allison.

As the day begins, Allison is upset because Christopher, her little brother, has scribbled in one of her books. She protests about wearing pants to school like Chris. When told to wear anything she wants, she puts on a fancy party dress. When Christopher is dropped off at his school, Allison is disappointed because his teacher pays more attention to him than to her. Back in the car, she tries to get her parents' attention but is unsuccessful. Finally, when she is not chosen "Queen" at school as she expected, Allison develops a stomach ache and has to be taken home.

Jeannie is covering a news story when Allison becomes sick, so Amos has to pick Allison up. Amos, too, is very busy, and he and Jeannie argue on the phone. That night they realize that they had both felt frustrated and guilty about juggling family and work responsibilities. They also see that Allison has been feeling "invisible." She needs help in feeling special.

**WHAT CAN JEANNIE AND AMOS
DO TO HELP ALLISON FEEL MORE
"VISIBLE?"**



ACTIVITY PAGES

activity #1

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR IDENTITY

You are a children's doctor in a small town. Parents often consult you when they are concerned about their children's behavior. The four situations below are typical of the kinds of questions parents ask you.

How would you advise parents in each case?

I just don't know what to do with my 2-year-old daughter Amy! She's usually a very good child, but lately she's developed a terrible habit. Whether I tell her to pick up her toys, or to come in and eat, the answer is always "NO!" I've scolded her over and over for being fresh, but it hasn't seemed to help.

What in the world is the matter with her? And what can I do to stop those "no's"?

We try to teach our children to be kind and considerate. We tell them what's right and wrong, and try to set a good example. In spite of this, our 3-year-old son Tom has been acting very selfishly. He doesn't like to share his toys with anyone. We have to make him do this. Just the other day, when his baby sister started to play with one of his trucks, he got furious.

We're really upset. What have we done wrong?

When I come home from work at night, you'd think my kids hadn't seen me for a year. Every night it's the same thing: "Daddy, look what I made today." "Daddy, guess what I'm going to do tomorrow." "Daddy, watch this." "Daddy... Daddy..."

Why do my kids need so much attention? Will I spoil them if I keep giving in to them?



The most awful thing has happened! Our 5-year-old son Jerry loves to dress up and pretend to be different people — the postman, a fireman, a potato farmer, a storekeeper, and things like that. Usually my husband and I encourage this. Last week, though, I found him playing with his sister's dolls and pretending he was a "mommy."

I'm just sure he's going to grow up to be a sissy. What should I do?



activity #2 GRAVE EXPECTATIONS

Many things make up our total picture of ourselves. Part of our identity, for example, is how we feel about our sex, race, and position in the family. Sometimes people outside the family make unfair or unkind judgments of children based on these factors. Part of a parent's job is to help children cope with these influences on their identity.

How would you deal with each of the following situations in ways that helped strengthen your children's identity?

You have a 5-year-old daughter who loves to run and jump and play games. One afternoon she comes into the house looking very sad. When you ask her what's wrong, she says: "I wanted to play ball with Jimmy and his friends, but they said I can't play because I'm a girl and girls don't know how to play ball."



You are a black parent grocery shopping with your two young children. As you round the corner from baked goods to fruits and vegetables, you pass a white parent with his young son. The little boy asks his father in a very loud voice: "Daddy, why do those people have such funny hair?"



Your 4-year-old son comes home from nursery school in a grumpy mood. He is particularly irritable with his older sister. You sit down and talk to him. You find out that he is upset by what his teacher said that day when he was practicing writing: "Come on, Jason, I bet you can do better than that. When your sister was your age, she could write both her first and last names without making a mistake."



activity #3
IDENTITY MAZE

Find your way to identity by circling the correct answers to the questions in the following maze.



GRAB BAG

to do

1. Watch how children express their growing self-awareness. Observe a group of young children playing in a day care center, nursery school, Head Start center, or your home or neighborhood. Watch the children for at least 30 minutes and keep a record of:

- what the children say and do to assert their identity
- whether these words and actions cause conflicts with other children
- how the adults in the room or area help build (or put down) the children's identity
- how things in the room or area support (or fail to support) the children's identity.

2. a) Conduct a survey of books for preschool children. Look for ways in which they tell children about one of these aspects of their identity:
 - what it means to be a boy or a girl
 - what it means to be a member of a particular racial or ethnic group
 - what it means to live in a certain geographic area
 - what it means to have parents with certain occupations

How do you think these messages affect the identity of children who are members of these groups? Children who are members of other groups? What can parents do about messages they don't agree with?

-- or --

- b) Conduct a similar survey of television programs. Include all the various types of programs that children watch: children's programs, prime-time programs, cartoons, and commercials.
 3. Try out one of the activities on page 7 with a young child. Report to the class on how it went and what you think the child learned.
 4. a) Write a poem or essay on "What It's Like To Be Me."
- or --
- b) Make a collage entitled "Me." Include pictures and drawings that portray things about you, things you like to do, things you own, places you've been, people you know, etc.

to discuss

1. The early childhood years have been called "the first adolescence," because this is when children first find themselves. The teenage years are a time when the struggle for identity is renewed. Children who get off to a good start establishing their identity in early childhood have an easier time in adolescence:

Do you agree with this?

Can you see how your own efforts to be independent now might be related to things that happened in your childhood?

GRAB BAG

2. Try to remember how it felt to be a young child:

Can you recall any situations when you felt that you were not being recognized?

How did you react?

3. How does it affect a child's identity to be in the minority:

Do parents of minority children have to make a special effort to help them build healthy identities?

What are some of the things these parents can do?

4. Do you agree or disagree that:

Children who are encouraged to express their identity won't be able to get along with other people because they will be concerned only with themselves.

to research

1. Erik Erikson's stages of identity in young children:

What happens in each of Erikson's stages?

What should parents do to ensure optimal growth at each stage?

2. Margaret Mead's studies of sex roles in other cultures:

How do children learn what it means to be a boy or a girl?

Are sex roles inborn or determined by the culture?

(See *Sex and Temperament* and *Coming of Age in Samoa* by this well-known anthropologist.)

3. The effect that the position of a child in the family has on identity:

How does it affect children's sense of identity to be first-born? Second-born? Last born?

Do parents expect different things of a second or third child than they do of their first?

4. How we continue to reevaluate and build our identity throughout adulthood. (See Erik Erikson, and also *Passages* by Gail Sheehy.)

BOOK BROWSING

Here are some books that contain more information on...

...the growth of identity

Childhood and Society. Erik H. Erikson. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1933. (paperback)

The Magic Years. Selma H. Fraiberg. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959. (paperback)

Toddlers and Parents. T. Berry Brazelton, M.D., New York: Dell, 1974. (paperback)

Your Child's Self-Esteem. Dorothy Corkille Briggs. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970. (paperback)

...some special situations that affect identity

Black Child Care. James P. Comer and Alvin F. Poussaint. New York: Pocket Books, 1975. (paperback)

Coming of Age in Samoa. Margaret Mead. New York: William Morrow & Company, 1961. (paperback)

Passages. Gail Sheehy. New York: Bantam Books, 1974. (paperback)

Sex and Temperament. Margaret Mead. New York: William Morrow & Company, 1963.

...what happens when a child's identity is not recognized

Dibs In Search of Self. Virginia M. Axline. New York: Ballantine Books, 1964. (paperback)

Sybil. Flora Schreiber. New York: Warner Books, 1974.: (paperback)

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